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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY'S "DON'T IGNORE, VOTE!"  
CAMPAIGN

REF: ISTANBUL 498

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Sandra S. Oudkirk for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary. Playing off an American rap star's "Vote or Die" campaign, a group of Turkish students and their professor at Istanbul's Yeditepe University have launched a popular get-out-the-vote initiative called &Koyverme, oy ver!8 (&Don,t ignore, vote!8) to promote voter turnout in the July 22 parliamentary elections. The campaign, which began as a classroom project on social responsibility, has attracted media attention and youtube.com hits, and may be an encouraging sign that Turkey's youth are not politically apathetic after all. The group members discussed their project,s aims, activities, and future goals with us on June 19 at their university. End summary.

#### BACKGROUND AND AIMS

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12. (SBU) In February 2007, Dr. Billur Ulger, an assistant professor in the Department of Advertising Design and Communication at Yeditepe University, asked her students to develop a classroom project on any topic relating to social responsibility. Concerned by voter apathy in Turkey (especially among younger citizens), Ekin, Murat and Tugce, all third-year students in the department, decided to focus their efforts on promoting voter turnout in the July elections.

13. (SBU) Billed as a campaign &by young people for young people,8 &Koyverme, oy ver!8 (KOV) seeks to encourage all Turkish citizens, but especially those between 18 and 30 years old, to demonstrate civic and political responsibility by voting. The three students firmly believe that all eligible citizens have a national duty to express their will at the ballot box. The campaign &is not about asking people to vote,8 said Murat. &We are ordering them to vote. Voting is not optional.8 (Note: Although Turks are required by law to vote, a small percentage pay the fine for failing to do so; a larger group admits to deliberately spoiling their ballots.)

#### ACTIVITIES AND ATTENTION

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14. (SBU) The group members began their project by polling 200 students at Yeditepe University to gauge young voter attitudes. The poll revealed that 82% of students on campus do not find politicians trustworthy and only 9% described themselves as &well aware8 of political party platforms.

According to Murat, his fellow students generally believe that politicians are not deserving of votes, and many respondents expressed a sense of hopelessness regarding Turkish politics: &The people who were in power when my grandfather was young are still in power today, so Turks think that nothing will change by voting,8 he said. Dr. Ulger added that &most Turks think politicians are just cheaters.8

15. (SBU) The group built a website, [www.koyvermeoyver.com](http://www.koyvermeoyver.com), to publicize its voter turnout campaign. So far over 8,000 people have visited the site, and KOV members expect this number to &increase exponentially8 in the final run-up to the July elections.

16. (SBU) The KOV campaign also recruited &Ulas,8 an up-and-coming rapper and current student at Yeditepe University, to write a song about the importance of voting. He performed the song before a large crowd at Bahcesehir University, which was broadcast live on ATV (a nationwide Turkish channel). Footage of this performance is available on [youtube.com](http://youtube.com) and has been viewed over 1,200 times. The song has also been sent to radio stations around the country, though at the time of our meeting none had played it yet.

17. (SBU) The campaign has attracted considerable media attention and has even received celebrity backing. CNN Turk recently featured an eight-minute segment on KOV, and Kanal Turk has done similar reporting. Ogun Sanlisoy (musician), Engin Gunaydin (actor), Meral Bayram (model), and other household names appeared in an advertisement endorsing KOV. The Genc Party proposed taking over the campaign but the group refused, preferring to remain strictly nonpartisan (reftel).

#### FUTURE GOALS -----

18. (SBU) Following the July elections, KOV members plan to continue highlighting the importance of voting. They will also work with professional pollsters to determine the effectiveness of their first campaign. The group aspires eventually to reach millions with its message of civic responsibility. When asked whether the campaign has given him hope for Turkey's political future, Murat replied, &If three or four of us were able to make this change, there is reason for optimism.8

19. (C) Comment. &Koyverme, oy ver!8 closely mirrors American rap star Sean &Puff Daddy8 Combs, &Vote or Die8 campaign before the 2006 presidential election, which KOV members acknowledge inspired their current efforts. This Turkish get-out-the-vote initiative reflects the growing influence of American culture in Turkey and the convergence of music and politics in both countries. It is also an encouraging sign that Turkey's youth, reputed to be politically apathetic, may be ready to engage on the political scene. End comment.  
JONES